

**T**his booklet written by a Southern white man is the basic story upon which Ralph Edwards built the "Piney Woods Story" for "This is Your Life".

When you have read it, please take it home to the Mrs. or give, or mail, it to someone you think will enjoy reading it.

In the joy of spraying  
a human orchard,

*Laurence Jones*

*A Brief  
Historical  
Sketch*

OF

THE EARLY DAYS OF  
PINEY WOODS SCHOOL


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By

1957 JOHN R. WEBSTER

## *forecript*

FTEN, I have thought that our friends should know more of the condition of my people in the early days of Piney Woods School than I, at that time, ever dreamed of. Many times, I have prayed that, in the interest of Piney Woods School, these facts might be known. And then, as so often does when one's faith is anchored in the LORD, the beautiful and unexpected happened.

From a little town in Arkansas (where he had migrated thirty years ago), my first Southern white friend, John R. Webster, Esq., a Mississippian, who had not written us for many years, sent this graphic account of opposition and danger, just the answer to my prayer.

*Lawrence*

# A Brief Historical Sketch

## OF THE EARLY DAYS OF THE PINEY WOODS SCHOOL

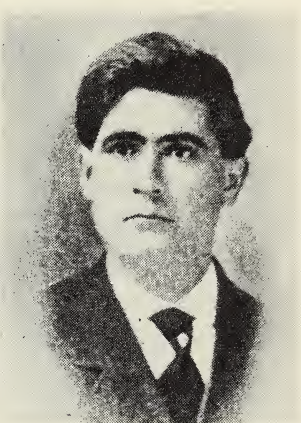
By **JOHN R. WEBSTER**—Mississippian

**C**ARL BEAL, an earnest young man who has chosen as his life's work the lifting of humanity into a higher sphere of life, who is now a stu-

dent in a theological college, has sent me copies of the **Readers Digest** and the **Rotarian** in both of which there was a writeup of the humble beginning of the now famous Piney Woods School. Mr. Beal has asked me many questions about this school and the details of its early growth; and it has occurred to me that, if in any way it has been an inspiration to Carl Beal, it might also be beneficial to others to know more about the story. So I am relating here something that has not been told before, and, if the writer brings himself into the picture somewhat, it is only for the purpose of showing the environment in which the founder of Piney Woods School, Laurence C. Jones, had to work. This was in the deep South, and the psychology of the people was the result of tradition and the impressions of slavery. The inferiority of the slave and the superiority of the Master wouldn't give away to common justice. So the Negro had no standing in society, schools, or courts of law.

You can't talk about Piney Woods School without talking about Laurence C. Jones, for they are part and parcel of each other. And when I look at pictures of this vast establishment, it seems more human to me than physical, because there has been so much humanity, or human effort, put into it.

The very beginning of this school was one morning when this young Negro walked into my sawmill office and introduced himself as Laurence C. Jones. **Myself and the other office force were surprised that a colored man would introduce himself at all.** Miss Nannie Simmons, the typist, and Albert Howell, the bookkeeper, perked up their ears to hear what our caller had to say. He went right into his subject. He spoke fast, compared with us Southern



**JOHN R. WEBSTER,**  
Esq.

*As he looked 45 years ago. He is now 80 years old, has returned to Mississippi with his devoted wife, living at Piney Woods School, the institution he made possible. For had it not been for him I could not have remained here.*

folks, and with well-chosen words. He outlined his plan for starting a school for colored people, and said he wanted the consent of the white people of the community and wanted my view of the matter. I told him I could not advise him favorably, for we white people were not able to educate ourselves, let alone the Negro. Our schools were kept up by taxation. The Negroes didn't have much property to pay taxes on, so we didn't think they were entitled to schools. I told him I thought it would be an up-hill piece of business to establish a tuition school as the Negroes would be unable to pay anything. I thought he had in mind a school supported by taxes and tuition, never having known of any other kind.

My talk seemed to discourage him, but I could see that he wasn't completely knocked out. He bowed very politely as he told me good-bye, thanked me, and asked if he might call back sometime and talk to me again. I told him he might.

Well, he had sort of tightened up the tension in the office, and, as the door shut, we all began laughing. Albert said, "Holy Moses and little apples". Miss Simmons said, with her brows lifted high, "Did you ever hear or see such impudence?" and I said, "No, I never". More laughter and remarks like, "But did you notice his tie?" "Gosh, couldn't he talk?" "Where do you suppose he got his bows and smiles?"

JONES came back in a few days. And, as Miss Nannie put it, he was more profuse in his bows and smiles. He came in apologizing, saying that he would be brief in his visit—that Uncle Ed Taylor had sent him over this time to know of me if I thought the white people around about there would be favorable to the school in their midst. He related that Uncle Ed said that, if he could get the school going, he would deed him the Old Montague Harris place as a location for the school. We were all giving him strict attention, and this seemed to be of some encouragement to him and he was really, as Albert put it, stepping on it with firm tread. I didn't care to interrupt him. Fact was we were being highly entertained. Miss Nannie wore her whimsical smile and Albert's eyes just got bigger and bigger. Jones went on to say that, if he could ever get the school started, he had rich acquaintances in Iowa that he thought would make donations to the school.

Here I broke in to do a little talking myself. I said, "Young fellow, I think you are taking too much for granted. Even if Uncle Ed gave you that land, you would not have a school. You couldn't use a shed that the sheep and goats have been occupying, and what we white people could, or would, help would be of no benefit to you, for we are sadly behind in education for ourselves, and, as I told you before, we are not paying out much of anything to educate the Nigger"

"But I shall not throw anything in your way. So far as I am concerned, you may proceed with your plans; but, if you want to know how these white people stand on it, you will have to get it from them".

When I had finished, he seemed to be a little downcast, he had lost some of his cock-sureness; but immediately he took out a little book and pencil, and asked for the names of white gentlemen that he ought to see. These are the names that I can recall I gave him: Bob Hemphill, Anderson Pruitt, William Pattie, Gabe Jones, Eddie Ammons, Roy Pattie—I added, "Be sure to go down to Braxton and talk to R. F. Everett; and Wiley P. Mangum, the banker; J. P. Cox; the Barwick brothers; and Mrs. Caline Barwick." Jones was in a hurry to get out, but turned to me with many thanks and asked, "Now, Mr. Webster, may I have your permission to call on you again?" I told him yes, but I was more interested in sawmilling than education.



This sounded like a wisecrack to Nannie and Albert. At least it served for a laugh to **relieve them of the high tension of just having to sit and listen to a young colored man talk.** Then we had some conversation about the possibility of Jones building up a school like Booker T. Washington did in Alabama, but we agreed that it was absurd. Albert remarked, "But suppose that fool did do a thing like that." I said, "Listen, Albert, don't ever think that fellow is a fool, and besides, the poet says, 'Fools go in where Angels fear to tread'."

**N**OW, remembering those days, I can see how Jones and Uncle Ed Taylor used my paws to rake their chestnuts with. At that time, nearly every man in the country, including merchants and farmers, was getting in some way money out of the sawmill. Naturally, I would have some influence in the community. Besides, I wasn't one of "them furiners", some of whom were drifting in. I was a native product. I was employing both Negro and White Labor on the same terms; most of them, boys I had been raised with. When Jones went out to interview these farmers round about, he would always say, "I have been talking to Mr. Webster and he said so far as he was concerned it was all right, so I have come to get your consent also". He would go on to relate his project. He would stress the point that this was not to be a book larnin' school, but he was going to teach how to work on the farm, and to build fences, gates, water gaps, sharpen plows, work with cows and hogs, etc. This was the type of school that was pleasing to the people and Jones was capitalizing on our human weakness to want to be consulted about things. It enhances our self-respect and satisfies our ego, and further there was to be a way to get more and better work out of a Negro.

Now it was the chief conversation in the community. As these fellows would come into the store to get their mail, you would hear them say, "Well, what do you think of that nigger school? Well, I don't know. Did that nigger come to see you, too? Yes. What do you think about it? Well, I think it's a good thing. He says he ain't gwine to teach 'em so much book larnin', but he wants to larn 'em to do more and better work, so when we wants good work done we can git it. That nigger seems like a good nigger, I likes him. Yes and he said he wanted we white folks to be satisfied and willin' for him to have the school". (Nigger used by the masses is the South's word used for Negro.)

Let me say here that this working or industrial agricultural school was the only kind that could have been established here at that time, for a book larnin' school for the Negroes would have gotten no local support whatever, and Jones would have aroused prejudices that would have been fatal, for a Negro wasn't supposed to read and write and especially how to figger. If his name was wanted for legal purposes, he made his cross mark (X).

Well, I think it was not more than a week before Jones came back and found me out in the lumber yard. He said he had some good news. He said, "Mr. Webster, I have talked to everyone of those men you sent me to and everyone of them said he liked my Idea of learning my people how to work, They said we white folks ought to have more of them working schools." (That was before the days of the County Agricultural Schools.) I said, "Yes, you better get busy". I think I was rather curt, but I was busy myself.

In a few days Albert came into the office one morning and exclaimed, "**Well, Cap, have you heard the latest?**" "**No.**" "**Well, fool Jones is actually teaching school over on the old Montague Harris place.**" "**Is he using the old goat shed?**" "**No, they**

said he was under that old cedar tree but is whitewashing and fixing up the old goat cabin."



*The old sheep (coming out of the end) shed. An old cabin where slaves once lived before the war between the states.*



*The log cabin with sheep coming in and out as Dr. Jones found it with the sheep running across the front.*



*The old cabin straightened up, white-washed with adobe chimney.*

*The first group of students in Piney Woods School and the Founder and Principal Laurence C. Jones, Marshalltown H. S. 1903, State University of Iowa 1907, Honorary degree Cornell College Iowa 1947.*

Albert and I were in an animated conversation when Miss Nannie came in and asked, "Now, what is all this funnin' about?" Albert told her that fool Jones had actually opened up his school at the old Montague Harris place under the shade of a tree. She did a little dramatic stunt that she thought very impressive or at least made her look interesting, and remarked, "That Crazy thing," and I said, "Miss Nannie, stop right there.. Listen, Albert, Jones may be crazy, but he ain't no fool." I was repeating the words of a song. So we had that as kind of a by-word in talking of Jones' school. "He may BE CRAZY, BUT HE AIN'T NO FOOL."

Jones was coming to the Post Office, Comby, established for the mill and surrounding community, and we were passing each other frequently; but Jones merely told me what he was doing, without going into any details. I think he sensed that he was bothering me too much, but one day he came in the office with a package of letters and said he wanted to get them in the next mail and thought I would not mind his using my machine to address them. It was then noon time and we were preparing to go out, so I told him yes, there it was, to go ahead. So he sat down and slipped in an envelope. We all were lingering, pretending to be doing something, especially Albert and Miss Nannie, but mainly seeing if this Crazy Jones could use a type-writer. **Well, when he hit that key board, it went like a hundred wild geese flying South. There was such a clatter that there was nothing else to hear. We were amazed at his speed.** Miss Nannie showed signs of fainting. Albert was tickled pink at the expression on Miss Nannie's face. As for me, I was not going to be surprised at anything that fellow could do.

In a short time, Jones came in the post office to mail his letters. He had 50, that were, he said, going to friends up North, asking for a small donation to his school. I thought fast. I could see that any money put into our community by rich men in the North would help pay me \$1.50 in cancellation, and I was going to give it back to him. "Hereafter, I will furnish you stamps for your letters, and further, any time you want to use one of my typewriters, you may do so and also you may use any stationery in the office that suits you," I said. Well, this just about overwhelmed Jones with gratitude. He couldn't frame his words. I said, "Oh, well, no need to thank, go to it." From then on Jones was in the office nearly every day, using the two hours at noon when the others would be out. He has since told me that my giving him that privilege was more encouragement to him than anything up to that time and gave him a freeness of feeling that he hadn't had before, that he felt like I was his friend in truth and fact.

**O**NE day Jones and I met at the store and each one seemed primed to talk. I asked Jones what luck he had with all those letters he sent North. He said, "Not much, Mr. Webster, only about 15 dollars out of that whole lot." I asked him what was the replies, and he said, "Well, they don't think I can make a go of it and it would only be money wasted." I said to him, "Jones, they have good reasons. I, too, believe you are pulling up hill. I think you have chosen the wrong part of the country—you should be in a large town or city, where you could get a strong local support from the Negroes, for as you know a white man here is not trained to pay out anything on a Negro's education. Jackson, Vicksburg or Meridian would have been better. He didn't let me get my say out. He just jumped right in to dispute with me. He said, "Mr. Webster, I want to show you that you are wrong. Isn't this to be a Country Life School? How could I demonstrate Agriculture in a city? And how could I ever get a start in a city? I came here broke, how could I have paid board? If it hadn't been for Uncle Ed Taylor and his once having been a slave and taking pity on me, I would have had to beg you white folks for a meal; and besides Uncle Ed has given me 40 acres of land. How could I get that land anywhere else? And, as for being where there are more Negroes, they wouldn't be any help to me, without the white man's help. I am right here at the right place. You have a white school and church and cemetery, and a lot of fine white people all around here; and it's up to me to make friends with all you white people, and if I can't do it, then I will go back where I came from. Now, Mr. Webster, this is a yard stick and if I can't measure up I will be moving, but no city for my school." His argument was unanswerable so far as I knew and I was willing for him to have the blue ribbon for oratory for that occasion, so I merely remarked, "Well, I guess you are right. Take courage, for it is said, the darkest hour is just before day, and that every cloud has a silver lining."

The Post Office was in the store, and it was noticed that Jones never bought anything out of the store. Manuel said he had never bought a thing. He would walk down the groceries side and look, but would never buy anything. One day he walked up to the pigs' foot keg and asked the price of pigs' feet. Manuel told him, "10c a foot, or 5c a half foot: would you like some?" "O, yes, I like them; but I will not take any today." Manuel said he never seemed to have any money at all. He said Harry Cox told him that Old Man Ed Taylor wasn't giving Jones anything but corn bread and peas to eat for breakfast, dinner and supper. Then some of the boys had to crack a joke about the man who ate peas for breakfast, drank water for dinner, and swelled up for supper. I told Manuel that, if ever Jones asked the price of pigs' feet again, to give him a dozen and tell



him it was on the house. I don't know if he ever got the pigs' feet, but I have an idea if he had known that order was out he would have feasted on pigs' feet to his full capacity.



*A group of my first Southern & Northern white friends standing under  
"the old cedar tree"*

*Second from the right Captain Asa Turner who had a company of colored soldiers during the war between the states. Fourth from the right Major Millsaps, founder of Millsaps College, Jackson, Mississippi.*

I wasn't trying to keep up with Jones' school; I was entirely too engrossed with my own affairs. There wasn't any time for anything else; but, after so long a time, Jones came in the office one morning looking downspirited, or as Albert put it, "Down in the mouth." Miss Nannie said he bowed plenty polite but that he had lost some of his smiles. He came right to the subject at once. He said, "Mr. Webster, I am in trouble. I have gone about as far as I can go myself. Uncle Ed and I have talked it all over and he said that he believed that you would help me a little if I would come to you in the right way, and I don't know of any other way to come only as a poor beggar. Well, now, this was drama. Albert and Nannie cocked their ears. They had their eyes on me, and I felt like I was being gazed at. I thought fast. I sensed something unusual. I waited for Jones to go ahead. "Well, what is it?" I asked. He says, "Well, I have just got to have some kind of a school house. I have got 40-odd pupils and no school house." Yes, this was drama, and I was on the spot. Albert and Miss Nannie afterward teased me about the lines of pain they saw written on my face. But I don't think it was that bad. Jones continued to speak. He said, "We haven't got anywhere to go except the little old log cabin we took from the sheep and it's getting cold from the fall rains and you know these little black boys and girls haven't any very good clothes." I interrupted him. "Yes, Jones, it's pitiful, I know you need a building. Now, what is the least you can get on with?" He said, "Mr. Webster, beggars mustn't be choosers." "Well, now, let me speak plain to you, Jones. I have never believed that it was worthwhile to educate the Negro in the South under the present environmental conditions. You know we regard the Negro as a servant to the white man, but I must say that you have an unusual proposition, through a new approach, and **I will say that you have more guts and determination than any man I ever saw. So I am going to trust to your perseverance and integrity to the end, and I am going to give you ten thousand feet of lumber for that school building, and I will grant you credit as you need it from time to time.**" Well, you might think that he would



have been profuse in his bows and smiles, but not so. He only spoke a few words, saying in effect that he would strive to live so none of us white people would ever lose faith and trust in him. He said he had to hurry on as Uncle Ed was waiting for him; and, as he went out, I called to him to say that I would have Jimmy Morgan to make out the bill for the lumber and have my teams to put it on the ground right away.

When he had gone, we just sat and stared at one another. Presently, I broke the silence by asking, "Now, Ladies and Gentleman of the Jury, what is your verdict?" Albert was the first one to speak. He said, "Well, Cap, I say you are guilty of gross incompetency to handle this business. I have set right here and seen that fellow pull your leg for a car load of lumber, and no telling how much credit? But I am glad to know you have such a liberal heart." Then he put on a long face and said, "Mr. Webster, I am going to marry Nell Caddis right away and we haven't got any house, and our children will have to stand out in the rain and cold. Will you please give the lumber for a house for us? If you won't do it, Cap, will you please advance me some credit which will be all the same to me?" Miss Nannie seemed to have turned over her basket of giggles. She had her hands over her face, pretending to hide a blush she was forcing herself to make, and I asked her what she had to say about it and she peeped through her fingers and said, "Well, I am like Mr. Albert, I am going to marry Mr. Webb, and I want some lumber too." I really did give Albert the lumber, but I didn't give it to Nan.

The report got around that Jones and the children were putting up the building with a little help from some of the older men who would not be working at the mill, none of whom I knew to be carpenters. I was fearful that it would be an unskilled job. After a while, Jones came to me and said he would dedicate the school Monday morning when they would begin teaching in their new building; and he asked me if he might be permitted to name it "Webster Hall." I told him I didn't know about that, but I would let him know later. Jones had invited a lot of white people to be there and there were lots of colored people there. When I arrived on the scene, I took one look at the building and my heart sank. It killed my ambition to be known as a great philanthropist and have a building named after me. I felt ashamed of myself for not having sent Jimmy Morgan over there to build Jones a good house. Then Jones came up to me and asked if he could name it "Webster Hall." I said "No, Jones, I'd rather not." He seemed disappointed but never did know why I came to that decision. Next in order was speech making. I was called on to make a speech, but if Jones expected me to make a speech, he should have told me two or three months in advance, so I wouldn't have forgotten everything I wanted to say when I got on the stage. I could only think of a few lines about Demosthenes, "and little acorns grow into trees."

Jones had to curtail his great dedicatory oration, because he couldn't call it "Webster Hall." Some of the white people present made some very pleasing remarks about the school, but Hector McLaurin (colored) who was studying books under Jones, to better understand his Bible, really took the rag off the bush. This was Hector's first and greatest opportunity to show his fellow countrymen how long and loud he could preach. Hector clinched his fist and rolled his eyes toward Heaven, which he could see through the crack in the roof, and called upon God to bless them in their efforts, and "O God bless these good white people who is here today. Help them to stand by us and to hold up our hands while we tryes to help ourselves." It was a masterful plea and a lot of folks shook his hand on that day. It was a nice and enjoyable occasion. I was amazed that

they could be so proud of that little old sorry building. Jones himself seemed not to notice the sorry construction of it. They all looked upon it as a perfect thing and looked upon it as if it were made out of gold. It was pitiful to me to see such devotion in this make-shift building. I just can't quite understand it to this day, any more than they knew it was theirs and that they now had a chance.

**F**ROM this time on Piney Woods School began to grow. Jones told me one day that the new school building was a light that lit the dark road he had to travel and enabled him to travel on. He said he was getting some small donations from friends up North. He said, "You see, Mr. Webster, I have something to point to as a success, and nothing succeeds like success. They believe that you white people down here are going to help me and not hinder me."

Jones had gotten the money to buy an adjoining farm—the Bob Hemphill place. He had built a dormitory and brought in some teachers, one of whom was named Yancy, a colored young man and a graduate. He was an expert on hog and cattle raising, a veterinarian, fruit and truck man. He was devoted and loyal to the school. Now Jones offered Yancy's service to any white man that (this was before the county Agricultural agent) needed him, and many there was who got his service free of charge. Jones was just as anxious to help the white people as he was his own color, and many were the kind deeds that he did for the white people. In fact, he was our very best neighbor. He would send his students to help some sick family with their crop, or as a servant in the house if there was a new baby or a death in the family. He would send his Choir out to sing for aged people who could not go to church, or he would furnish his own conveyance to carry them, and he would serenade them with his band, and go out and sing Christmas Carols at Yuletide. Why shouldn't a man like this have the esteem of the Southern white men, even though he might be prejudiced against the Negro?

Jones had a way of bringing in big men from other places. He would frequently send me a note by a student to please come over and meet some distinguished person who was going to be there. One day I had a note from him saying to come over and meet Dr. Simmons from Jackson. I believe Dr. Simmons was to be there at 2 o'clock and make a speech. I was the only white man there. Simmons having come unexpectedly. Simmons made a fine talk and his subject was sticking to your bush. He told of some school children out black-berry hunting. They would run from bush to bush, but there was one little boy who was crippled and couldn't run, so he got a bush and just stayed there and picked berries. When the hunt was over, the little crippled boy had more berries than any of the others.



*PINEY WOODS COUNTRY LIFE SCHOOL—AS IT WAS IN 1914*

*Old cedar tree and log cabin—First school building—Industrial shops—  
Girls Dorm—Laundry                      Ginny—first farm animal*

He said, "Now, all you children here are crippled children in mind—you have an opportunity now to learn, so let me tell you to stick to your bush, learn to read and write, and don't grow up like your father and mother, having to sign your name by making a cross mark." His address was well-received and, when he had finished and turned to go, Jones stepped up and says, "Now, Dr. Simmons, I want you and Mr. Webster to come with me, and we will have some dinner." I saw Simmons' face flush a deep red and he was moving to go with a shake of the head. I knew that he thought he would have to eat with some colored people, so I spoke quickly to relieve the tension that I saw growing on his face. I took his arm, and says, "Dr., let us take him up, I'll bet he's got fried chicken. So with reluctant step, and glancing about skittishly, we went into a private dining room built for just such occasions. There was no one but Jones besides two waitresses, neat and in white uniforms, there to serve us. They had really turned out dinner, — not only fried chicken but chicken pie, sliced potatoes, egg custard, creamed potatoes, and a wonderful salad dressing. Well, the Dr. was so relieved that he really became entertaining, and I think we both ate too much. I saw him in Jackson later and he said, "Jones had some good cooks." I told him, "Yes, that was part of the curriculum."

Jones had one rich and distinguished white visitor to the school. That was Uncle Asa Turner. He and his wife were both white-headed, but were well and vigorous. He was a farmer from Iowa. He was distinguished because he finished a course at Ames College after he was 65 years old. He was a great friend of the Wallace family. He said they had been worth millions of dollars to Iowa in the culture of corn. Uncle Asa told me he was down here to see Jones and to study his school with a view of leaving him a legacy. Of course Jones wanted to make a good impression, so he sent out written invitations to all the white people to come on a certain day and hear Uncle Asa speak and to bring their wives and daughters. The day arrived and there were about 50 whites there, some women, some young ladies, but mostly men. Uncle Asa was deeply interested in stock and corn raising and gave us all some mighty good pointers, for he had made a success out of it himself. He spoke for more than an hour, and Jones' band played their best. Then Jones led the way down to the Dining Hall, saying "all white friends, come right this way." Some of the ladies were loath to go or was waiting for a little more persuasion, as is a habit with them, but I got Coz Caline Barwick in after them and their husbands got them by the arms and we ushered them all in. There were two long tables and one of the finest dinners you ever saw spread. Uncle Asa presided at the table and said a long prayer of thanks. Everyone enjoyed themselves and we departed in high spirits.

**N**OW I want to relate an event in this story of the Piney Woods School to show you how it was that Jones was sitting on top of Dynamite and didn't know it.

The next day after this big dinner at which Uncle Asa had made his speech, Jones came over to me and said Uncle Asa wanted to come over and spend the night with me to talk over some matters, and asked me if I would loan him my buggy to bring Uncle Asa over. It was all right with me, so Jones drove the buggy over and presently came back with Uncle Asa and Mrs. Turner. Jones carried their baggage upstairs in a building we called the Hotel. My wife and I had rooms up there and we fixed up our visitors in a nice room, and we sat up that night until 1 o'clock talking.

Well, the next afternoon Jones came back for them and he had to wait a while for them to get ready, and Jones stood around and talked to us all for perhaps one-half hour. A drummer or two and a



lumber inspector from Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and a mill employee or two had paused to listen to Jones talk, and then Jones carried the baggage down and got in the buggy by the side of the Turners and drove them over to the school. **His being upstairs and riding in the same seat with the Turners, caused some unfavorable comment,** and it was the kind of gossip that some Southern people like. The more was said, the more was added to. Some of them **censuring me** and my wife for having **"them thar Northern Yankees"** in our home, said they had been living with the **"niggers."** Uncle Fleet Howell (my Mother's uncle) who was employed at the mill came to me and said, **"John, you have made a mistake; they are saying some mighty hard things about you."** I told him to let it drop and say no more about it; but the talk didn't stop, and in a few days Manuel Bridges, who worked in the store and was a boy playmate of mine, came to me and said, "John, there is something going on around here but you mustn't use my name." I said, "all right, Manuel, what is it?" **Then he told me that there was talk of raising a crowd and taking Jones out and giving him a whipping and ordering him back up North where he came from.** Let me say here that there was only two or three of the mill crew that had joined this bunch, but it mostly came from those on the outside. I thought I would make my position clear to the whole outfit, hoping that it would avert trouble. So I called in Uncle Fleet and Mr. Bill Phelps, who had known me long before I wore my first pants buttoned up in front, and who had good jobs at the mills and both of them had three sons, each employed at the mill. These two gentlemen usually had access to all the grape-vine gossip round about. So I talked the matter over with them, and said, "Now this thing has got to stop; I am going to hold you responsible. If anything is done to Jones or that school, I will shut this mill down until every guilty party has been arrested or made to leave the country. You know what happened to that bunch that thought they would set up a whiskey business here; don't you? And you may say to these fellows that I know who they are, and I know how to reach the Federal Authorities." I really got on a high horse. I sometimes had to get on a high horse to get results.

At Commencement time a new school building was finished, so Jones invited all the people both white and colored to come to the school Commencement. The Auditorium was full of people and we never saw anything like this before. He had the work of the school carried on, on the stage. They were making dresses, doing laundry, welding iron, filling wagon wheels, making plow harness, vaccinating pigs, cooking biscuits and ginger cakes and passing them around through the audience, making brooms and straw hats, etc. It was a marvel to see and as some of them commented, "there wasn't much book learning to be seen." They would say, "It's just like Jones said; he was going to learn them how to work." Jones was riding high in public favor.

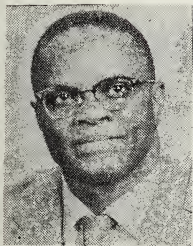
**A**S the Piney Woods School grew, there was a marked change taking place among the Negroes. Every merchant in the little towns of Braxton and Star would tell you that the Negroes were spending more money for their children to keep them in school. They were buying new furniture on the installment plan. Their wives and children were cleaning up, as Jones told them. "Look at these white people. Keep your clothes washed. Keep your own kitchens like these white ladies' kitchens. Pattern after these white folks and you will get somewhere. Keep your premises clean and be more sanitary." He had built a laundry and was teaching both young and old how to wash, starch and iron; and all the colored women and the students were being taught how to can fruits and vegetables. I asked a local White man fellow how he liked the school, and he said

"just fine." He said, "you know he's teaching them colored people how to work, and not much book-larnin," and that's what I've allus said, "'larn people how to work as well as reading and figuring'." I agreed with him and went further and said that I thought our white schools ought to teach more work and less book larnin'. He said, "That's right, that's right; you are right." So we agreed on everything apparently and parted good friends.

Now, after thirty years absence from Mississippi, I am recalling some of the events connected with my life and Jones' school. Much has taken place down there in forty years. It has required an immense sum of money and a lifetime of effort to rear up this immense institution. I sometimes marvel and ask myself the question, "How was it done?" First, I will say, it was built like all other institutions upon the personality of the founder. Jones had the disposition to fit into that particular nook at that time. It was his earnest desire to help his race and he wanted to help the white man too, if he could. He would and did absolutely surrender himself to the will of his white friends, getting their advice and sanction in all matters, and especially did he stay away from Politics. He told me that it was ignorance that was hurting his race. **He said that the South depended upon the colored people as their laborers and that they were a great undeveloped resource. He quoted old Socrates, "Not only is he idle who does nothing, but he is also idle who might be better employed."**



TEACHER TRAINING CLASS OF 1956



**CHEF-STEWARD —**  
D. E. Ross, Chef-Steward on the Steamer Wm. A. Irvin, Pittsburgh Steamship Division of the United States Steel Corporation.



**BROADCASTER —**  
Miss Willa Monroe, first woman broadcaster of her group, WDIA, Memphis, Tennessee.



**A SCHOOL PRINCIPAL—**  
F. D. Cashier, Jackson, Miss.

## Special Needs As Of Today

Water Hose for fire—400 feet—per foot.....	\$ 1.10
Paint.....	
Mess hall and kitchen—75 gallons—a gallon.....	4.30
Outside paint 110 gallons—per gallon.....	4.10
Barb Wire.....	300.00
Carload of Slag for soil conditioning.....	600.00
Deep Well.....	10,000.00
Cleaning and painting steel watertank, 100,000 gallons and 100 feet.....	600.00
Replace water mains, main 3000 feet per foot 2.00 off short lines 10,000 feet per foot 90 cents.	
Plumbing.....	
Hardware faucets to save water.....	450.00
To create three apartments for teachers in the old academic building.....	2,400.00
To create music rooms for teaching music and music practice rooms—3 rooms.....	1,200.00
Post Office—Piney Woods, Mississippi—We lease space to government but we need to make the improvements. The concrete floor is against health of the people who work there, need a wood floor.	
Cost.....	450.00
Paint.....	90.00
General repairs.....	250.00
Porch Teachers cottage.....	750.00
Garage adding kitchenette to apartment.....	675.00
Visitors Booth.....	690.00
Permanent Band Stand and Bell Tower.....	2,500.00
Pasture Ponds.....	1,600.00
Sewerage System.....	3,500.00
Combination Machine Shed, corn crib.....	3,000.00
Hauling Truck to haul freight and express.....	2,500.00
Wire Fencing.....	1,500.00
Trade school training shop for boys.....	90,000.00
New Roof on Girls' Dorm.....	3,000.00
New Roof on Iowa (Administration) Building.....	3,200.00
Dairy Barn Repairs.....	1,200.00
Paint Dairy Barn—200 gal. paint.....	820.00
(our boys do the labor and painting)	
Complete overhaul of plumbing in Boys' Dorm.....	2,700.00
To help a boy or girl get started—	
Scholarship.....	250.00
Industrial Scholarship.....	150.00



## postscript



ONE DAY, just after receiving the above story of the early days of Piney Woods School, I went out into our country community and read the manuscript to Mrs. Idonia Gipson, wife of the late Amon Gipson, whose team of gray mules was ever at the need of the school when we were without.

When I had finished, with tears in her eyes, she said, "Us cullud women folks was working around the white folks in Braxton and Star and you just DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH DANGER YOU WAS IN but some other good white folks like Mr. Bill Pattie, Mr. Wiley Mangum and Mr. Everett told them to let that 'nigger alone' until he makes a mis-step."

When I first came South, a wrinkled elderly grandma whose personality caused one to think her ancestors might have been African kings, advised me—and I have always remembered—"Bud, you is from up Norf, down here you is among de 'secesses'—you is got your paw in de lion's mouth, don't you go to rarin' and pitchin' to get it out, you jest ease it out, the best way you kin."

Whether it was that admonition or being fortunate enough to have common sense to remember "When in Rome, do as Romans do," I am certainly happy that the old adage, "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise," enabled me to keep on praying as if everything depended on God and keep on working as if everything depended on me."

*C. Jones*



**PINEY WOODS SCHOOL IN 1957**  
**Gray Brick Buildings—red roofs all**  
**surrounded by the green woods**

**OUR ADDRESS:**

Mail and Parcel Post—**Piney Woods, Mississippi**  
Express or Freight—**Piney Woods School,**  
**Mendenhall, Mississippi**

**FORM OF BEQUEST**

I hereby give and bequeath to "The Piney Woods Country Life School" of Piney Woods, State of Mississippi, the sum and amount of:

-----Dollars

-----  
Witness

-----  
Testator